

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

Season 4, Episode 51: Season Four Prologue

Old Gods of Appalachia is a horror anthology podcast, and therefore may contain material not suitable for all audiences, so listener discretion is advised.

[“The Land Unknown (The Bloody Roots Verses)” by Landon Blood]

*These old roots run
into a ground so bloody
Full of broken dreams and dusty bones
They feed a tree so dark and hungry
where its branches split and new blood flows
And the ghosts of a past you thought long-buried
rise to haunt the young
The shadow falls as judgment comes
Tread soft, my friend, amongst your fellows
Make your bond your word
Lest you get what you deserve*

O Appalachia: will you ever be unbloodied? O Mother, will your vestments ever be clean? Are we destined to stain you with our coal blackened blood and soot stained hands for all eternity? How much of you will be left once we have taken our fill, or once we admit we will never be filled, that we are the ever-empty bellies, the starving mouths, the broken teeth that will grind themselves to dust and pulp before they ever stop trying to consume? We who refuse to be weaned will drink these hills dry if you let us. We few, we wretched few, we band of ragged brothers and sisters and kin will rattle on through these hollers long after the coal is gone and the jobs dried up. We stay because you are home, and because you are all we know, mama.

Appalachia is a place that knows all about consequences, both those that we intend and those we cannot foresee. Over the eons, she has watched her own mountains softened, be smoothed over, diminished and eroded by weather, by time, and of course by men. The actions of men have held far-reaching repercussions for mother Appalachia, and for her children. Just ask Sister Wolf, or Brother Falcon, or hell, the folks living over on the Qualla Boundary, what few remain since their ancestors were driven from their land or killed by their fellow men.

Our mother has known little in the way of justice, has seen no divine retribution for the sins of those who have wronged her, though on occasion folks might put on a little show, an absurdist parody of crime and punishment — the kind of people who believe themselves righteous enough to stand in judgment of others, though often as not they tend to have more secrets buried in the back forty than just about anybody else around. Just such folks convene now to bring another to task. In the many years he has walked this world, he has at times played the Fool, at others the Magician or the Devil, even the Hermit a time or two. Now friends and enemies, witnesses and accusers, gather to decide his fate. The High Priestess, the Empress, the Hierophant and the Lovers will all have their say, and if he doesn't play his cards right, he might just find himself cast as the Hanged Man.

So it goes, family. So it goes.

Along the banks of the rivers that feed into the deepest part of the valley, a young woman in the pains of childbirth flees in the direction of safety with those who would protect her. The night itself seems to pursue her, as unseen things rattle and prowl in her wake, driven on by their dead-eyed master. Safety is but a porchlight away, but what follows, patient and tenacious, is accustomed to the long hunt.

In the verdant hollers that twist through the mountains, a young man returns to the land that birthed him after witnessing what his kind can become in the far-flung fields of war, hoping to lead a quiet life, a life unbothered by other folk, where he can sit in the silence of the woods and try to forget the things he has seen and done. A man like that should be left alone if folks know what's good for them, but folks seldom do. There might be dispute about who drew first blood, but there will be no doubt who draws the last.

In the shadows of the Blue Ridge, a fancy man at a farmer's market courts a young witch, promises her the world and all its wonders. We know the usual outcome of such honey-tongued promises penned in the pages of love letters, but we hope all the same. Yet when true love calls and the cock won't crow, the cows won't milk, and the bees stop making honey, how sweet can romance be? A man's word should be his bond, and a promise made has consequences, be it kept or broken.

These troubles and more can all be traced back to a singular being in one way or t'other, one who has planted his roots deep in the night-black soil of our land. The repercussions of his choices twine through time like kudzu vines, creeping insidiously through the woods of Appalachia, until they clutch its beating heart in a stranglehold. Many bear the marks of both his curses and his blessings, and they will have a chance to speak now. Many come to condemn him. But who — or what — might stand for such a man?

The Wheel of Fortune spins, and they gather to decide his fate. Those who would play Justice have much to say about the consequences of his actions, and yet they possess no crystal ball that they might gaze into the future to look upon those far-reaching outcomes. And one such as he plays a long game — you can bet your life on that, family.

*They will gather in number from holler and glen
Those who would speak for the beasts and the men
There'll be witches, of course, with axes to grind
Seeking the remedy they never could find
Shadows will rise from the depths of the earth
Echoes of madness and things never birthed
They will come too, for 'tis only fair
the Dark sends the Stag when the Green sends the bear
For all have been cheated, swindled, betrayed
and finally, perhaps, these debts will be paid.
Let them come to the rock and each plead their case
and accuse the old serpent right to his face.
For a man gets a trial as laid down by the pact
even if that man's not a man, and the man's name
is Jack.*

["Atonement" by Jon Charles Dwyer]

Well hey there, family. Welcome to Season Four of Old Gods of Appalachia: Root & Branch. It's been a while since we gathered here together on the regular in the name of the darkest

mountains in the world, and its good to see y'all, whether you're kinfolk we've known from back in Season 1 or if you just stumbled upon us because of that fancy new role playing game that just come out from Monte Cook Games. All y'all are welcome at the table as long as you behave. Now we've been busy since the last time we saw y'all at the end of Season 3. We took the show out on a national tour, called it the Price of Progress, went all over the country: east coast, west coast, down south, up north, midwest — you name it, we were there. So special shout out if you happened to join us for one of those nights of music and fellowship and congregation.

his season is a first for us y'all, as in a way, we'll be picking up from the events of the previous season and carrying on from there. So if you ain't caught up through Season 3, I highly recommend you do that before joining us on the journey through Season 4. Our man Jack is in a mighty sticky situation, and its gonna be a long and twisting ride to see where he ends up on the other side. We're real excited to have y'all along for the ride.

If y'all wanna keep up with our comings and goings, we encourage you to head on over to oldgodsofappalachia.com and complete your social media ritual by following us on all the platforms of your choice be it Facebook, Instagram, Discord, or the rotting corpse of That Thing That Was Once Called Twitter but is Not. If you'd like to join with us in the manner of financial as well as moral support, you can head on over to patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia and for a reasonable sum gain yourself access to hours and hours of exclusive Patreon storylines and other goodies.

This is your beginning of Season 4 reminder that Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of DeepNerd Media, distributed by Rusty Quill. Today's story was written by Cam Collins and performed by Steve Shell. Our intro music — the brand spankin' new Season 4 theme song — was performed by Brother Landon Blood, and our special outro music "Atonement" is by Jon Charles Dwyer. We'll talk to you soon, family. Talk to you real soon.